



6013 Lakeside Blvd.
Indianapolis, Indiana 46278

Fact Sheet

February 2003

Farm Bill 2002

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

OVERVIEW

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a voluntary program that encourages the creation of high quality wildlife habitats that support wildlife populations of National, State, Tribal, and local significance. Through WHIP, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial assistance to landowners and others to develop upland, wetland, riparian, and aquatic habitat on their property.

NRCS and the participant enter into a cost-share agreement (generally 5 to 10 years) and NRCS agrees to reimburse up to 75 percent of the cost of installing the wildlife habitat practices, not to exceed individual practice hold-down rates, and not to exceed \$25,000 per agreement.

DO YOU QUALIFY?

Eligible lands under the program are:

- Privately owned land
- Federal land when the primary benefit is on private or Tribal land
- State and local government land on a limited basis, and
- Tribal land

Ineligible lands under the program are:

- Land currently enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), and land subject to an Emergency Watershed Protection Program floodplain easement
- Land where USDA determines that impacts from onsite or offsite conditions make the success of habitat improvement unlikely

WHAT PRACTICES ARE ELIGIBLE?

Upland Wildlife Habitats. The establishment of cool or warm season grasses, legumes, forbs (wildflowers), and shrubs to provide nesting, brood-rearing, and loafing/roosting cover.

Field Borders. The establishment of cool season grasses, warm season grasses, legumes, forbs (wildflowers), and shrubs around the perimeter of crop fields to provide nesting, brood-rearing, and loafing/roosting cover.

Permanent Woody Cover. The establishment of tree and shrub windbreaks, corridors, and coverts to provide protective nesting, brood-rearing, loafing/roosting, and winter cover.

Vegetation Management. The application of practices that modify the existing vegetation, such as fescue eradication, strip disking, strip spraying, woodland edge enhancement and the creation of forest regeneration openings to improve habitat for early successional wildlife.

Fencing. The establishment of fencing where the exclusion of livestock from woodlands, wildlands, wetlands or streams will improve wildlife and aquatic habitat.

Riparian Habitat. The establishment of bottomland hardwoods and riparian corridors.

Restoration of Declining Habitats. The establishment of prairie, savannah, or sedge meadow.

Wetlands. The creation, restoration, or enhancement of wetland habitats.

Other Practices - other practices including, contour buffers, streambank and shoreline protection, and the development of wildlife watering facilities may also be applied.

HOW DOES THE PROGRAM WORK?

- A person wishing to apply for funding should visit their local USDA Service Center or IDNR, Division of Fish and Wildlife District Wildlife Biologist for assistance in completing an application. Applications are accepted on a continuous sign-up basis.
- As part of the application process, points are awarded (application is ranked) according to the amount of habitat being created or enhanced, types of practices being implemented, cost-share rate selected, benefits to Threatened or Endangered Species, and proximity to protected areas.
- Once NRCS has received their annual allocation of WHIP funds (usually in mid February), all applications that have been received by a pre-established cut-off date are pooled and placed in descending order according to ranking score. Applications are then selected for funding (based on ranking), the applicant is notified, and funds are obligated to each contract. This process is usually repeated every two weeks until the annual allocation has been depleted.
- An NRCS representative or an IDNR, District Wildlife Biologist then contacts the approved applicant and a Wildlife Habitat Development Plan is prepared in conjunction with the applicant to implement the practices outlined in the application.
- The landowner then enters into a cost-share agreement (usually 5 to 10 years), agreeing to install and maintain the WHIP practices for the specified period and allow NRCS or its agent access to monitor the effectiveness of the practices.
- NRCS reimburses the landowner for work completed, based upon an on-site inspection by NRCS or its agent, review of all applicable receipts for materials and labor, and the cost-share rate agreed to in the agreement.

WHAT ARE THE LIMITATIONS OF THE PROGRAM?

- The landowner must complete all specified work within at least 2 years prior to the expiration of the agreement.
- NRCS is not liable for any non-payment of charges for materials, labor or services contracted by the landowner or applicant in response to the WHIP agreement.
- No payment will be made without final inspection and certification by NRCS or its assigned agent.
- The maximum cost-share limit that a landowner can receive through WHIP is \$25,000 per agreement. However, in instances where the participant has a Wildlife Habitat Development Plan with exceptional benefits to wildlife, the State Conservationist can authorize additional WHIP funds over the \$25,000 limitation.
- Other non-NRCS funding sources can be used to supplement the 75% NRCS cost-share, however, total funding (NRCS funds + non-NRCS funds) cannot exceed 100% of the cost of the practice. Non-NRCS funding sources can include other federal and state agency program funds, as long as those sources permit it.
- All practices specified in the agreement shall meet NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) Standards and Specifications.
- Any practice initiated prior to cost-share agreement approval is ineligible for financial assistance.

For More Information

If you need more information about WHIP, please contact your local USDA Service Center, listed in the telephone book under U.S. Department of Agriculture, your local Conservation District, or IDNR District Wildlife Biologist. Information also is available at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2002/>



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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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Q. Are private groups and organizations eligible?

- A. Private groups or organizations are eligible for the program if the practice occurs on land they own.

Q. What if a landowner fails to comply with the cost-share agreement?

- A. The penalty for failure to comply with the development agreement will be no payment and potential loss of eligibility for future financial assistance.

Q. Can Wildlife Habitat Incentive Areas be hunted?

- A. Landowners taking part in the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program do not relinquish ownership or control of their property. According to state law, hunters must obtain the landowner's permission before hunting on private land.

Q. What happens if the actual expenses exceed the amount in the agreement?

- A. According to the agreement, NRCS will reimburse the landowner based on the cost-share rate and the Not-To-Exceed (NTE) dollar value established for each practice. Expenses in excess of the NTE value are borne by the landowner. Participants are strongly encouraged to obtain written quotes for all materials and labor prior to initiating any work.

Q. What happens if only a portion of the practices specified in the agreement are completed?

- A. If only a portion of the practices specified in the agreement are completed, then NRCS will pay the applicant an amount equal to the cost of the practices that have been completed, based on the cost-share rate and their NTE value.

Q. I would like to develop wildlife habitat on my land, but I don't know what is needed. Is there someone who can help me?

- A. IDNR, District Wildlife Biologists are competent, technically trained biologists. One of their duties is to assist landowners with wildlife management. They will be able to make helpful suggestions for improving wildlife habitat on your property.

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NRCS Q&A Legal Disclaimer: These questions and answers are not intended to be definitive interpretations of farm legislation. Rather, they are preliminary and may change as USDA develops implementing policies and procedures. Please check back for updates.